

DR. NORRIS, 67, DIES OF SUDDEN ILLNESS

**City's Chief Medical Examiner
Since 1918 Is Stricken by
Heart Ailment at Home.**

FAMED IN MURDER CASES

**Celebrated Crimes He Inquired
Into Made Medico-Legal Ex-
pert Nationally Known.**

Dr. Charles Norris, Chief Medical Examiner of the city for eighteen years, whose investigation of the sensational murder cases of New York had made him widely known as an expert on medical jurisprudence, died last night at his home, 344 West Seventy-second Street. He was 67 years old.

Active despite his years, he had returned from a vacation cruise just before Labor Day, and had gone back to his desk at the Municipal Building, apparently in good health. Yesterday morning, however, he complained on awaking that he felt ill and a physician was summoned.

His ailment was diagnosed as acute dysentery, and was not regarded as serious. In the afternoon, however, he began to grow weaker, and his relatives were summoned. The death, which occurred at 8:30 P. M., was attributed to coronary cirrhosis.

With him at the end were Mrs. Norris, who is the former Eugenie Gebhart; Miss Fannie Norris of New York, a sister, Dr. Rudolph Paltauf, a son-in-law, and Mr. and Mrs. Hamilton F. Potter, cousins. Mrs. Paltauf, his daughter, who is on vacation, could not reach home before his death.

Funeral arrangements had not been completed last night. They will probably be announced today, it was said at the Norris home.

A tall, commanding figure, with carefully trimmed Vandyke beard,

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Dr. Norris was known not only to hundreds of New Yorkers, but to many persons in other parts of the country, since he had lectured widely on subjects connected with his work as medical examiner.

Of the cases he handled professionally, one of the outstanding was the murder of Joseph B. Elwell, bridge expert found slain in his West Seventieth Street apartment fifteen years ago.

The death, due to shooting, had been described as a suicide before Dr. Norris's appearance in the case. Not satisfied from his inspection of the body and the apartment that it was a suicide, the chief medical examiner ordered the body removed to the morgue. There he established that Elwell had been shot by a revolver held directly in front of his forehead, in such a position that the victim could not have pulled the trigger himself, and provided the Police Department with one of its most baffling murder mysteries.

Saved One Accused Man.

Only a few of his cases were listed as unsolved, however. In hundreds of other homicides he gave testimony against the defendants in murder trials, and in at least one celebrated case saved a man who had been accused of murder. The defendant involved was Michael Troy, whose wife Bessie was found dead on the sidewalk in front of their apartment at 1,455 Amsterdam Avenue in 1919. On the complaint of relatives that the body had been thrown from a window to cover up a murder, Dr. Norris investigated. He was able to establish that the woman had been living when her body hit the sidewalk, and this cleared the husband.

Appointed by Hylan.

When Mayor John F. Hylan appointed Dr. Norris to the post of Chief Medical Examiner on Jan. 30, 1918, the job was entrusted to a deliberate-spoken man, then director of laboratories at Bellevue and Allied Hospitals, who saw in his new work a splendid opportunity to link medical science with the law.

For the rest of his life Dr. Norris strove to take full advantage of that opportunity. He became almost a legendary figure in the life of the metropolis—a genius in his own right who had in his personality much of the detective and philosopher, apart from his rich equipment as a medical expert.

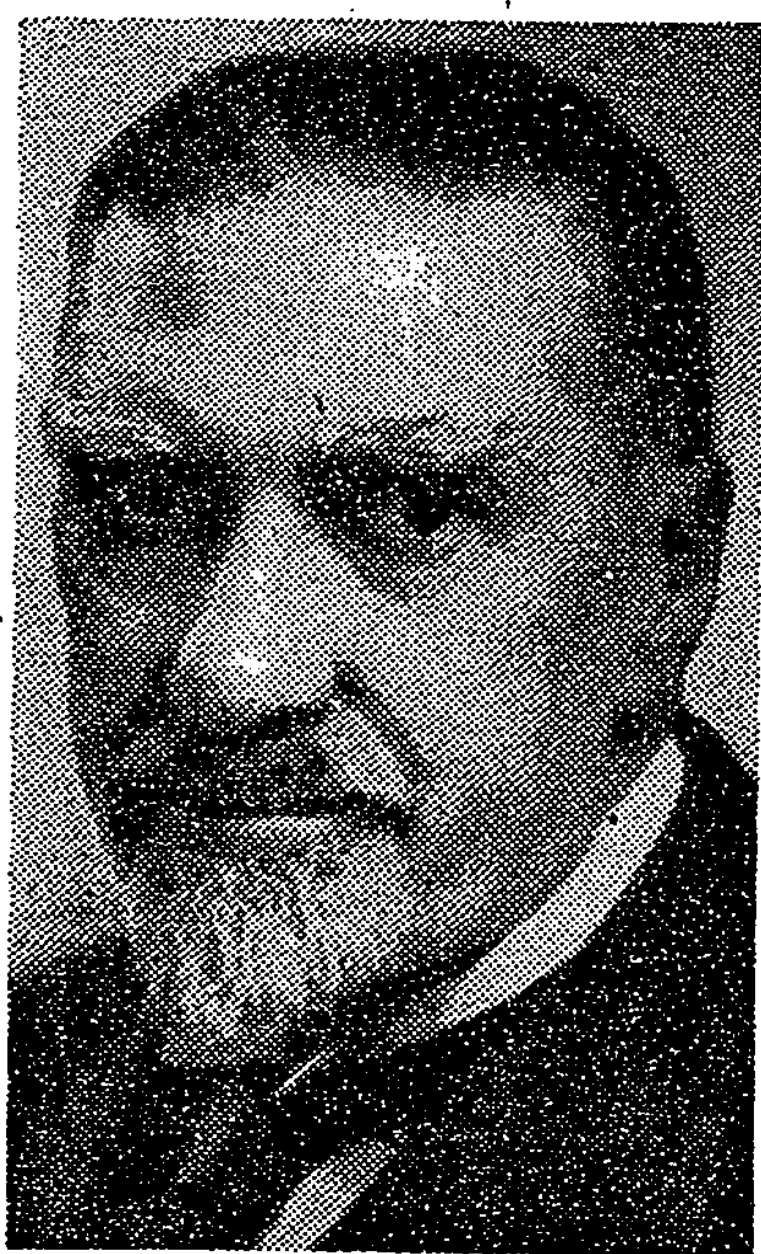
His name figured closely in the investigation of those sporadic "big" cases—the murders and suicides that fill the front pages and seem to have a whole city agog. But at the same time he had a flair for pursuing narrow trails of possibility in obscure cases. He was a constant reservoir of material for the feature writer; a reliable source for the author of crime material with a fact basis.

In an administrative as well as personal sense the work of the Chief Medical Examiner changed with the appointment of Dr. Norris. The Board of Coroners had been legislated out of existence at the close of the previous year. An insight into the benefit to the city accruing through the change was provided in February, 1919, when Dr. Norris, in a preliminary report on his first year in office, noted a saving of \$67,000. Much of the saving was attributed to the introduction of more progressive scientific methods by the new chief.

Living up to his own interpretation of his job—"the medical examiners are required to investigate all the surrounding circumstances of death"—Dr. Norris early in his tenure of office had to cope with odd problems. Following the Wall Street explosion in September, 1920, he extracted from a victim's body a curved piece of metal showing the probability that a bomb had caused the blast.

Fought Health Menaces.

At the same time he frequently lent himself to non-laboratory work directed at lessening factors in modern life he regarded as health menaces. In March, 1922, he assailed three chiropractors, charging that homicide actions against them



Pach Bros. Photo.
DR. CHARLES NORRIS.

had been neglected by the District Attorney's office for months.

One of his most frequent expressions of opinion concerned prohibition, which he vigorously opposed. All through the "dry" era he issued warnings and general advice concerning the menace of poison liquor. He compiled many series of statistics showing grimly the toll exacted by the illegal alcohol.

An intensive police investigation followed the revelation by Dr. Norris in 1922 that six persons had died of arsenic poisoning after eating pies in a restaurant on lower Broadway.

In the Dorothy Keenan (Dot King) case, seven months later, the chief medical examiner's report indicated not only the cause of death but the facts that whoever applied the chloroform was a person of exceptional strength and that "the position of the body suggests that a hammerlock hold had been applied."

In November, 1923, Dr. Norris performed an autopsy on the body of 4-year-old Irving Pickelny, who had disappeared from his East Side home. He gave the opinion that the boy had probably been killed accidentally when the slayer covered his mouth to keep him from crying out.

All types of humanity came under Dr. Norris's investigation. In January, 1924, he performed the post-mortem examination on Frankie Jerome, popular Bronx bantamweight boxer, who died following a ring battle with Bud Taylor. The chief examiner declared the death purely accidental and said he could recall only two similar cases in five years. That led him to credit boxing with a "remarkable record," in view of the large number of bouts fought.

Other cases in which he figured in 1924 were the shooting of Isidor Kantrowitz, Detroit bootlegger; the suicide of Herbert Seymour Darlington, member of a well-known Philadelphia family; and the coal gas deaths of Dr. G. W. Partridge and Mrs. James L. Joughin.

Made "Dead Men Tell."

The following year, a few months after he had worked on the death of Louis S. Frankheimer, aged retired banker, upon whose body no fatal wound was apparent, Dr. Norris was guest of honor at a testimonial dinner at the Hotel McAlpin. District Attorney John E. McGeehan of the Bronx sounded a keynote when he asserted that Dr. Norris's work made "dead men tell more tales than live ones ever could."

Early in 1928 Dr. Norris attacked a proposal to curb autopsies. He warned an Assembly committee that passage of the measure would bring a possible increase in murders. The year before, in the notorious Snyder-Gray case, he had given a close analysis of the part played by the poisoned whisky found in the suitcase of Henry Judd Gray when he was arrested in Syracuse.

The mysterious death of William L. D'Olier, sanitation engineer, occupied Dr. Norris for a time in the Fall of 1928. In this case, he was forced to report that the autopsy had not determined whether the fatal wound was self-inflicted.

A month later, when the city was shocked by the deaths of Terrence and Benjamin Waldman, child heirs to the Benjamin Guggenheim fortune, in a 16-story fall from a

hotel roof, Dr. Norris continued his investigation even after a second police study of the facts had resulted in the theory of accidental deaths. Emphasizing that he had no other theory of his own, Dr. Norris characteristically made clear that he was continuing merely with a view to placing the whole truth on the record.

When Arnold Rothstein died, tight-lipped, on Nov. 6, 1928, Dr. Norris advanced the idea that the gambler, shot while seated, might not even have seen his assailant. This was significant in that the "underworld code" of silence was generally given as the gambler's motive for not revealing his foe.

Dr. Norris was always cautious and would not issue a formal statement as to a death until the facts completely satisfied him. Cases in which he applied this caution included the C. R. Winant death at the Princeton Club in May, 1928, and the double tragedy involving Homer L. Carruthers, brokerage aide, and his bride, the following April.

When James J. Riordan, president of the County Trust Company and friend of Alfred E. Smith, committed suicide in November, 1929, Dr. Norris withheld the news until the bank closed for the day so that its depositors might not be unduly alarmed.

Once Quit as Protest.

On Sept. 20, 1932, Dr. Norris shocked his associates and the city generally by announcing his resignation. He took the step, he explained, in protest against Acting Mayor Joseph V. McKee's order cutting his budget 20 per cent. A petition to Mr. McKee was quickly drawn up asking reconsideration. Dr. Norris withdrew his resignation and took up his duties after a personal appeal from the Executive, who expressed pleasure at the medical examiner's agreement to continue.

The possible loss to the city of its veteran chief examiner drew much attention to Dr. Norris at this time and a series of newspaper articles did much to inform the public of the strange details of the scientist's work.

He once remarked that his queerest case was "that fellow with the woman's leg." It was in 1926. A policeman apprehended Francisco Trapia, a longshoreman, in connection with the finding of a headless torso. Trapia "confessed" suddenly; he had "cut her up" and thrown the arms and legs in the river. Dr. Norris, examining the severed head, astounded detectives by declaring the woman had died of carbon monoxide poisoning. The crazed defendant was eventually acquitted; as Dr. Norris explained, he had actually thought he had murdered the woman in some way, whereas actually she had been overcome by fumes from a kitchen stove and was dead when he decided to dispose of the body.

The murder of Edward A. Ridley, wealthy eccentric, in 1933, Dr. Norris regarded as "nothing especially remarkable." Last year, on May 2, one of the strangest of his experiences befell him when, while preparing to perform an autopsy in the Bellevue Morgue, he recognized the body as that of Dr. Ladislaus Michael Schwarz, a refugee German pathologist, who only a day before had been appointed an assistant medical examiner in a new department. The man, struck by an automobile, had been unidentified.

When Otto H. Kahn died in March, 1934, Dr. Norris interrupted a lecture to seventy-five detectives

at the Police Academy to rush to the Kuhn, Loeb offices and give permission for the body to be removed.

Last January, when police stood popularly accused of beating to death a 20-year-old prisoner, Dr. Norris cleared them, proving the youth had died of a complicated internal condition—adding that the police handling "didn't do him any good."

In the recent thallium deaths of five members of the family of Frederick Gross, Dr. Norris backed Dr. Alexander O. Gettler, city toxicologist, when the latter determined there was no trace of the poison in the can of cocoa that figured importantly in the investigation.

What He Sought to Do.

Dr. Norris, who before assuming the position in which he made his name, had studied in several European cities and had taken post-graduate courses in Vienna and Berlin, once expressed his idea of his duties in this way:

"My only object is to run the office efficiently and to obtain results along medical lines. I mean by this the establishment of a medico-legal institute which would do research work along the lines being done in the larger central European countries. There is no reason why a city of the size and magnificence of New York should not do this work."

Recent administrations had given him a freer hand and a larger staff, chiefly at his own insistence.

Dr. Norris was born in Hoboken, N. J., on Dec. 4, 1867. He was educated in Cutler's School here and later at Yale and the Columbia College of Physicians and Surgeons. He became a doctor of medicine in 1892. From 1906 to 1910 he was instructor of pathology and bacteriology at Cornell University, later going to Bellevue.

He was a member of the New York Academy of Medicine, the Pathological Society of New York, the Association of American Bacteriology and Pathology and other groups.